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WASHINGTON: The U.S. House of Representatives is urging five countries to speed up the opening of a secret Nazi archive that documents the lives and deaths of millions of World War II concentration camp inmates.

In a resolution passed with bipartisan support Wednesday, the House urged the international commission that controls access to the archives ratify changes in a 1955 international agreement on the management of the files to make them public.

The U.S. Senate passed a similar resolution earlier this month.

Until recently the archives held in Bad Arolsen, Germany, had been kept in secrecy. The documents' importance became clearer in recent months after The Associated Press obtained extensive access to the material on condition that victims not be identified fully.

At its meeting last month, the 11-member commission set in motion a process to open the records by the end of this year after all 11 had ratified the decision. Britain, Israel, Netherlands, Poland, Germany and the United States have ratified; Belgium, France, Greece, Italy and Luxembourg have not.

The House resolution, introduced by Democrat Alcee Hastings and Republican Mark Kirk urged the commission to "consider the short time left to Holocaust survivors and unanimously consent to open" the archives, if the remaining five countries to not ratify the changes by May.

"It is beyond shameful that for 62 years, Holocaust survivors, their families and historians continue to be denied immediate access to Nazi archives," Hastings said in a statement.

The House resolution also urged the countries that have not ratified the opening to follow through and do it.

The Bad Arolsen archives contain 30 million to 50 million pages of documents that record the individual fates of more than 17 million victims of Nazi persecution, the resolution says.

The files have been used since the 1950s to help determine the fate of people who disappeared during the Third Reich and, later, to validate claims for compensation.